

# IDRC

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE  
Box 8500, Ottawa, Canada, K1G 3H9 • Telephone (613) 996-2321  
• Cable: RECENTRE • Telex: 053-3753

# FEATURE

*A monthly features service on scientific, technical, and educational subjects pertinent to development.*

Words: 1185 approx.

## WORLD ARMAMENT:

### A RACE AGAINST DEVELOPMENT

by Michelle Hibler

There is a grim irony to the fact that while the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament (UNSSOD), was going on, the member states of NATO - the North Atlantic Treaty Organization -- were agreeing to spend an extra \$80 billion on beefing up their defence arsenal against the Warsaw Pact countries.

"I do not believe this form of behavior is compatible with the goals of détente", said American National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, about the reported massing up of conventional weapons by the USSR. It might equally well be applied to the behaviour of all nations during the past 16 years, when the USA and the USSR created the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) to achieve general and complete disarmament.

If ever there was a misnomer, it was the designation of the 1970s as the Disarmament Decade. The UN also designated the 1970s as the second Development Decade. Eight years into the decade, nothing of substance has been achieved: the pace of world armament has quickened and development has stagnated. The two facts are not unrelated. More and more, development experts are pointing out how the arms race enhances and exacerbates major world problems -- development, economic imbalance, inflation, pollution, energy, trade relations and technology -- by diverting funds, materials, manpower, will and energy from their solution.

The figures on current world military expenditures are staggering. The annual world arms bill has topped the \$400 billion mark and no end is in sight.

World nuclear stockpiles have an estimated force of more than a million nuclear bombs that destroyed Hiroshima. An additional six nuclear warheads are built each day. The world armed forces total approximately 24 million people -- more than the entire population of Canada. And while there are almost as many soldiers as teachers in the world, military-related occupations employ 60 million people and one quarter of the world's scientific manpower.

On average, countries devote 5 to 6 percent of their output to military ends. Some spend as much as 30 percent. The poorest countries spend as much for military activities as on agricultural investments.

Compare this to development programs: to eradicate smallpox from the world, the World Health Organization spent \$83 million over 10 years -- not even enough to buy one modern strategic bomber. To eradicate malaria would cost an estimated \$450 million, but the program has been dragging for lack of funds although it needs less than half the daily expenditure for military purposes.

In 1975, the World Bank estimated that \$12.5 billion, per year, over the next 10 years, would suffice to overcome the fundamental obstacles to development. Food, shelter, water, transportation, education and health care would be provided to one billion people, the poorest quarter of the world's population, at a cost of less than five percent of what is directed annually to military purposes. So far, this objective has not been reached.

The real cost of the arms race is more than the military expenditure figures show. A United Nations expert report transmitted to the current General Assembly session concludes that military procurement is more inflationary than other forms of expenditure since it creates a demand for goods and services but provides none. It also contributes to unemployment despite claims to the contrary. According to estimates from the United States government, for example, \$1 billion of military expenditure creates 76,000 jobs, whereas the same amount spent on civilian programs would create an average of more than 100,000 jobs. If released for private consumption by means of tax cuts, the same billion would create 112,000 jobs -- 55 percent more.

The report further states that:

- the enormous diversion of resources constituted by the estimated 400,000 engineers and scientists working on military projects has been disguised by excessive claims about the importance of civilian spin-offs from military research and development. If anything, military spin-offs from civilian research have been incomparably greater;
- the arms race compounds the balance of payment difficulties for most countries since military imports generate no income and no exports to service the debt incurred;
- in developing countries, the resources needed to maintain modern armed forces -- foreign exchange, skilled technical and managerial staff, industrial production capacity, etc. -- are subtracted from the development process.

The arms race is also a major impediment to the transfer of technology to developing countries and to the expansion of research related to development. It tends to render the international political climate more rigid and resistant to change, fosters concern for the political and social options chosen by other countries and promotes a pattern of alliances and alignments that might reinforce confrontation and domination.

It should also be noted that the two superpowers account for 60 percent of the world military expenditure and 75 percent of the world's arms trade: military aid, classed under the label of "foreign aid", exceeds development aid several times.

There is a basic contradiction between a continuation of the arms race and the establishment of a more equitable world order. The mood of confrontation and the various strategic considerations influence trade and aid policies, technological and scientific cooperation as well as other exchanges.

Mrs Alva Myrdal, leader of a group of experts who submitted a report on Disarmament and Development in 1972, demonstrated that the arms race tends to undermine freedom, curbs the expansion of human rights, brutalizes life, distorts institutions and deprives the world of rational perspectives for

the future. The frantic search for national security only leads to greater insecurity. The UN experts state that it is necessary to dispel illusions that lasting peace and security can coexist with huge accumulations of the means of destruction. Lasting peace and security can only be obtained through an equitable social and economic development.

But competition to obtain weapons creates, to say the least, unfavourable conditions for organizing cooperative efforts to achieve a more just international order. And lack of progress on a new world order can only increase tensions and further the arms race.

To break out of this vicious circle will not be easy. After 30 years of disarmament negotiations, more and more countries are entering the nuclear club and the arms race. Many experts warn that unless some progress is achieved -- first in nuclear disarmament and then in conventional arms limitations -- a nuclear war is virtually inescapable this century. To break the momentum of the armaments race and use those resources, now wasted on the means of death and destruction, on rectifying the inequities of the present world system, demands, fundamentally, a transition from trust in weapons to trust in peace.

The threat has been recognized. At the close of the formal deliberations of the UNSSOD, almost all speakers had urged that action be taken to halt the arms race. But while they agreed on the scope, danger and wastefulness of the problem, they disagreed on its causes and dynamics. Many proposals were put forward to help solve the problem, including implementing a comprehensive test ban treaty, reducing military budgets, creating a special peace-keeping force, carrying out disarmament education and research, and holding a world conference. These proposals and others were discussed by the national representatives responsible for drawing up resolutions during the last two weeks of the session.

Whatever action follows the UNSSOD, it is clear that what is most needed is a serious decision for constructive cooperation towards new social

and economic goals. As Mrs Myrdal pointed out, "disarmament alone, although an absolute necessity, is not enough. Disarmament for peace is no longer sufficient. What we must work for now is disarmament and development for peace." Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister A.C.S. Hameed, speaking at UNSSOD in a similar vein summed up the situation succinctly when he said: "Let us decide now whether we want one future for the whole world, rich and poor alike, or no future...."

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IDRC-F79

June 1978